

Chapter One

Legacy of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars

Outline and Study Guide

1. Various Interpretations
2. Effects of French Revolution on European history
3. Can the spread of liberal and nationalist ideas in Europe up to 1848 be considered as a legacy of the Napoleonic Era? Explain your answer.
4. “French Revolution could be regarded as the beginning of modern European history.” Comment on the validity of this statement.
5. “Napoleonic Era had far reaching effects on European history.” Comment on this statement in the light of the development of liberalism and nationalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
6. Assess the impact of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire on political development up to 1870. (1989)
7. How was Europe, other than France, affected by Napoleon Bonaparte up to his downfall? (1992)

Various Interpretations

Talleyrand (representative of France in the Congress of Vienna)

1. “His genius was unbelievable. It is the most astonishing career that has been witnessed for the last thousand years. He was certainly the most extraordinary man I ever saw, and in my opinion the most extraordinary men that has lived for many centuries.”

J.C. Herold, *The Mind of Napoleon*

1. “Hitler appealed to hatred; Napoleon, to honour.....Napoleon, in his historic action left positive achievements behind him. Unlike Hitler, he left Europe not in ruins but brought it up-to-date. Even where his genius failed his purpose, its nature was such that it cooperated willy-nilly with the constructive forces of history; the unification of Germany and of Italy, the spread of democratic liberalism might not have been in accord with his intentions, but they most certainly owed much to his action. And as a myth and a symbol he pushed back the limits of human capabilities. It may be a costly process for humanity to produce Napoleons, but if humanity should ever cease to produce them it would be a sign that its energies are exhausted.”

Kropotkin (Russian anarchist and historian in the late 19th century) *The Great French Revolution*

1. “The French Revolution left a legacy on the principle of communism. Throughout the French Revolution, the communist idea kept coming to the front.”
2. “The French Revolution brought about the abolition of serfdom and absolutism.”

F.M.H. Markham, *Napoleon and the Awakening of Europe*

1. “The Revolution of 1789 had been, not one but three simultaneous revolutions, social, administrative and political. In 1800, the French people were prepared to abandon the political revolution in order to consolidate the other two.”

R.A. Nisbet, *The Two Revolutions*

1. “The French Revolution was the most important single historical event in Europe’s history after the fall of Rome.”
2. “The (French) Revolution became an obsessive model for the 19th century revolutionaries who admired its unique blend of power and freedom of power and equality, of power and fraternity, and of power and reason.”

Effects of French Revolution on European History

According to R. Nisbet, the French Revolution was “the most important single historical event in Europe’s history after the fall of Rome”. It was “the first great ideological revolution in Western history”.

The French Revolution was not a local event. It influenced profoundly not only the people of France but also those of Europe and the world. The French Revolution stood for certain principles and those were ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’. The example of France became the inspiration of Europe and even of the whole world. These ideas dominated the European politics throughout the 19th century and after. France became the cradle of revolution in Europe. It was said that “whenever France sneezes, the whole Europe catches a cold”.

A. On the international side

1. Growth of nationalism—rise of nationalistic movements

a. French Revolution’s contribution

- i. Prior to the French Revolution the loyalty of the nobles and the love of people for the king had taken the place of patriotism. The French Revolution substituted the idea of the French nation for that of the French Kingdom.
- ii. Because of the French Revolution, the overthrow of absolute rule, Louis XVI, with the subsequent establishment of the First Republic of France and the Declaration of the Rights of Man helped spread the idea of nationalism, i.e. people should be loyal to the state, not to the king.
- iii. The declaration of the 11 June 1792 that “the Fatherland is in danger” led to an outburst of the national feeling which inspired France to resist her enemies.

b. Napoleon’s influence

Because of the Napoleon’s influence, his conquer of countries made people have strong feeling of independence. The aggression of France in other countries of Europe provoked the feeling of nationality among them. This led to the growth of anti-French feeling against the French rule in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Prussia, Russia and Austria. The idea of national unity began to grow.

c. Result

- i. *Spain and Portugal*: It was the growth of a national feeling among the Spaniards and the Portuguese which enabled them to drive out the Napoleonic armies from the Peninsula.

- ii. *Prussia*: It was the same spirit which enabled the Russians to follow a scorched earth policy in 1812. The same feeling of nationality helped the revival of Prussia. The defeat of Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo also illustrated the importance of unity of Prussian and led to the growth of German nationalism.
- iii. *Poland*: The same idea gave a lot of headache to Russia on account of the unsuccessful efforts of the Poles to achieve their independence.
- iv. *Italy*: During 1814-15, Napoleon put his plan into practice and proclaimed the Union of Italy. He was however defeated but the idea that he proclaimed did not die. In this way, the Napoleonic regime had infused new life into Italy and given an impulse to union which had been strengthened on many a battlefield.

The above shows the increasing threat from nationalism. Nationalism had become known to many European countries. The growth of such ideas would impose a menace to the rule of absolute kings. That why they held the meeting in order to curb the spread of these ideas.

2. Growth of liberalism-rise of anti-absolutism

a. French Revolution's contribution

- i. The Declaration of Rights of Man by the National Assembly emphasized the fact that sovereignty resides in the people and law is the expression of the general will. The French Revolution asserted that the people should rule themselves and the government should be not only for the people but also by the people. It was recognized that sovereignty was not only a property of which the owner enjoyed the profits, but a magistracy established for the performance of certain duties.
- ii. By the slogan of "liberty, equality and fraternity", people started to believe that all men are free and equal by birth who could enjoy freedom of speech, press and religion.

b. Napoleon's influence

By some Napoleonic codes, people in France and other conquered states could taste liberty, enjoy voting rights and elect assemblies. Such policies made people believe that the machinery of the State was to work in such a way as to bring the greatest good to the people.

c. Results

- i. The liberal movements from 1815 to 1848 in Central Europe, such as the establishment of constitutional government in Prussia, France, Sardinia, Italian states and even Austria-Hungarian Empire in the late 19th century, all illustrated the great impact of French Revolution.

- ii. The result was that serfdom, feudal restrictions and the limitations imposed by the guilds were abolished. Religious toleration was assured. The freedom of press was established and the right of the general mass to education was maintained. The most outstanding example was the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in which Mary Wollstonecraft asserted that women should enjoy equal rights with men.
- iii. It cannot be denied that even the benevolent despots such as Catherine the Great of Russia, Frederick the Great of Prussia and Joseph II of Austria recognized the necessity of improving the condition of the people even before the French Revolution, but that was not the generally accepted view of the Governments of Europe.

3. Growth of humanitarianism

a. Reason

As a result of the rise of liberalism due to the French Revolution, 19th century Europe witnessed the growth of humanitarianism.

b. Result

- i. Efforts were made to abolish slavery and improve the condition of the prisons. The abolition of the slave trade in the Congress of Vienna was an example.
- ii. Serfdom was also abolished in Spain and Italy in spite of a temporary triumph of reaction. It was closely pressed in Germany after 1811 and disappeared in that country definitely in 1848. In 1861, Russia was compelled to emancipate her serfs and the war of 1878 put an end to serfdom in the Balkan Peninsula.
- iii. The work of enfranchisement begun by the French peasants in 1789, was continued in Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Austria by the armies of Napoleon.
- iv. Legislation was passed in many countries to improve the condition of the people in general.

4. Growth of Romanticism 浪漫主義

The French Revolution also helped the revival of romanticism by the assertion of individualism, the defiance of tradition and the establishment of human life on a basis of pure feeling. The influence of the French Revolution can be seen in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Southey's *Joan of Arc*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*, Goethe's *Faust* and in the early works of Coleridge.

5. Growth of communism

The French Revolution left a legacy on the principles of communism. Throughout the French Revolution, the communist idea kept commit to the front. During the French Revolution, a revolutionary leader, Robespierre, declared that only the superfluity 額外 of foodstuffs was to become the articles of commerce and what was necessary belonged to all. The communism of 1793 with its affirmation of the right of all to sustenance and to the land for its production. It denied the right of any one to hold more land than he and his family could cultivate and attempted to communalise all trade and industry. Therefore, the French Revolution was the source and origin of all the present communist, anarchist and socialist conceptions.

6. Replaced Britain as a leader in liberal movements

It is obvious that France became the spokesman of the human race and the idea of liberty became the watchword and charter of all the reformers and revolutionaries. Liberty became a universal creed. Not only personal liberty was secured but efforts were made to achieve political liberty. In this respect England led the way and France was next to her.

7. Initiation of the use of terror

R. Nisbet also points out the Reign of Terror was the origin of “the peculiarly modern connotations of treason and subversion.” It was in these terms that 19th century revolutionaries, such as Bakunin, could justify the use of terror. It is a justification that continues in the 20th century — in the works of Lenin and Trotsky, of Stalin, Hitler and Mao.

8. Sowed the seeds of total war

The resisting activities of the Spanish proved that a whole people was more powerful than disciplined armies. The idea of “the nation in arms’ was a great contribution to the world. In this respect the French Revolution had nurtured, in significant ways, the appearance of the concept of ‘total war’ or ‘great war’ nowadays.

9. Decline of religious influence in politics

E. Burns remarks that the Revolution “furnished a precedent for an ultimate divorce of religion from politics, not only in France but in other countries as well.” The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the confiscation of the property of the church, and the taking away of educational and charitable functions held by the Church were severe blows to the Church. However, the revival to the Church led to severe struggles between the clerical and the anti-clerical which were to bedevil the French politics into the 20th century”.

B. On France

1. Strengthened France

a. During the French Revolution:

- i. The French Revolution made France stronger and prosperous. Formerly, there was scarcity of food and commodities in many parts of France, but as a result of the Revolution, France began to produce much more of the necessities of life of every kind than in 1789. Never was there in France such an energetic ploughing as in 1792 when the peasants ploughed the lands they had taken back from the lords, the convents and the churches. They goaded their oxen.
- ii. For the first time in centuries, the peasant ate his fill, straightened his back and dared to speak out. A new nation was born. It was owing to this new birth that France was able to maintain wars under the republic and Napoleon could carry the principles of the Great Revolution into Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Belgium Holland, Germany and even to the borders of Russia.

b. After the French Revolution

- i. After all those wars, people expected France in 1815 to be reduced to misery and her land laid waste, what was actually found was that there was more prosperity in France than in the time of Louis XVI. The energy regenerated by the Revolution was so great that in a few years France became a country of well-to-do peasants. Her enemies found that in spite of all the blood she had shed and the losses she had sustained, France, in respect of her productivity, was the richest country in Europe.
- ii. Unlike Britain, her wealth was not drawn from the Indies or from her foreign commerce. It came from her own soil, from the love of the soil and from her own skill and industry.

2.

2. Abolition of serfdom and absolutism

Personal liberties were conferred upon individuals, undreamed of by the serf of the lord and the subject of the absolute king. The abolition of serfdom and absolutism begun in France in 1789 and slowly spread over Europe in the course of a century.

3. Change of family law

The family underwent profound change in law during the Revolution. In a law of 1792 marriage was designated a civil contract and several grounds for divorce were made available. The authority of the father ceased when the children reached legal age. In 1793 the age of maturity was fixed at 21. Relations between the family and its

domestic dependents were put upon a contractual basis.

4. A great blow to absolute monarchy

- a. It was a powerful blow to absolute monarchy. It brought a symbolic end to the century-long dynasty by the establishment of a republic. Thenceforth few kings dared to claim an unlimited authority. For example, when Louis XVIII was restored in 1814, he promised a constitution which was based on that of the French Revolution and which persisted in the Restored Monarchy.
- b. The Constitutions of 1791, 1793 and 1795 were to a great extent incorporated into the Constitution of the Restored Monarchy. The reorganization of the central government such as the establishment of the Committee of Public Safety improved administrative efficiency. The local governments were reorganized with considerable power. On the other hand, the feudal institutions of the Ancient Regime were destroyed.

5. Rise of liberal movements due to the growth of liberalism

- a. The turmoil during the Revolution seemed to create a tendency of revolution. The French were so politically conscious and so easily agitated that Revolutions broke out in 1830, 1848 and 1871 in France.
- b. The idea that people had the right to overthrow their government which was born in the French Revolution contributed to later revolutions. Liberty was the activating force behind numerous insurrections and so-called revolutions between 1800 and 1850. France became the cradle of revolution in Europe.
- c. It was said that “whenever France sneezes, the whole Europe catches a cold”.

6. Rise of factional struggle

- a. During the Revolution, different political parties emerged. For instance, by 1793, there were 5000 to 8000 political clubs. The struggles between the different parties led to political instability not only during the Revolution but also in the 19th century.
- b. The emergence of the Rights (Legitimists, Orleanists, Bonapartists etc.) and the Lefts (Jacobins, Republicans etc.) led to severe struggles between the Monarchists and the Republicans, and among the different factions of the Monarchists up to mid 1880s. The Napoleonic Legend contributed to the rise of Napoleon III.

The 19th century European history was overshadowed by movements inspired by ideologies such as romanticism, individualism, humanitarianism, nationalism and liberalism. Regime of Napoleon, who was the child of French Revolution, in this sense could be regarded as beginning of modern history, or in other words, the 19th century Western history was but a legacy of Napoleonic era.

Discuss the significance of the French Revolution for France and Europe. (for reference only)

The French Revolution was an epoch-making event in the history of Europe. Its influence existed through most of the years of the 19th century and was felt in other countries besides France.

Political effects on France

The French Revolution was an important step in the European-wide anti-feudal movement. It swiftly put an end to all the feudal privileges, laws and institutions of France. It dealt, first of all, a powerful blow to absolute monarchy. The restoration of a Bourbon to the throne of France in 1814 only forced the bourgeoisie to continue their struggle to hold their basic legal and political rights that they had gained in the Revolution. In 1830 they succeeded in driving out the Bourbons and installed a “citizen king”, Louis Philippe. They took a further step in 1848 by driving him out when he proved too conservative. In 1870 they finally set up a democratic republic in France.

Secondly, the Revolution destroyed nearly all the remnants of a decadent feudalism, including serfdom and aristocratic privileges. In particular, the attempt at the separation of church and state provided a precedent for the ultimate divorce of religion from politics, not only in France but in other countries as well.

Thirdly, educational reforms and codification of the laws were prepared by revolutionary leaders. Napoleon later consolidated these gains which laid the basis for future developments.

Finally, the French Revolution made nationalism an all-prevailing force in France. The French people were proud of their achievements and they were determined to protect what they had achieved: all these gave rise to a fanatical patriotism exemplified in the battle song of the Marseillaise. Moreover, the “levée en masse” mobilized the whole nation for war. Workers, peasants and bourgeoisie citizens alike rallied to the slogan “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” as to a holy cause.

Economic effects on France

The French bourgeoisie gained more economically from the Revolution than did any other class. It secured the abolition of the many tax injustices of the Ancient Regime. For instance, tax privileges of the aristocracy were abolished; local, and provincial tolls were wiped off and indirect taxes on consumer goods were cancelled. The Revolution created an orderly national code of commercial law, national uniformity of weights and measures, the metric system of calculation, and a national taxation law. The state was sympathetic to bourgeoisie demands for protective tariffs. Often the wealthy bourgeoisie now had a high standing in society.

The Revolution completed the process of serf emancipation in France and created peasant proprietors and rent-paying tenants. France emerged from the Revolution with a numerous class of land proprietors. The land they seized or bought cheaply was a striking gain to them, though a loss to the nobles and the church. Henceforth the peasants were conservatives in French politics.

However, the city workers and farm labourers without properties gained little. They were denied a vote and forbidden to form trade unions to bargain collectively with the employers. They complained that the bourgeoisie was now oppressing them. Small wonder then new doctrines appeared in the 19th century, especially socialism, which demanded among other things a more equal distribution of wealth through an anti-bourgeoisie revolution.

Political influence of the French Revolution in Europe

The French Revolution inspired the bourgeoisie and peasantry of other European countries where absolute monarchs and feudalism remained. They welcomed the Revolution and Napoleon's invading armies because these forces helped destroy feudalism and create the institutions of a modern state. Even though "restorations" took place in these countries later, the new passion for liberty and nationalism sparked off numerous revolutions in the 19th century. First came the uprising of the Spaniards against Joseph Bonaparte in 1808. This was followed by revolutionary disturbances between 1820 and 1831 in such countries as Greece, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Poland. Finally came the "Year of Revolution" in 1848 when nearly all European countries were affected by liberal and nationalist revolutions. Liberalism and nationalism had become the driving forces of the 19th century.

Ideological impact

New political ideas were popularized during the French Revolution. The rallying cry of the French revolutionaries was "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."

There were liberal advances but not yet democracy. The Revolution had put an end to absolute monarchy. In place of the "Divine Right of kings" the doctrine of the "will of the people" or the "will of the nation" gripped the public mind. This was understood to mean, first, defining and limiting the powers of government by a constitution; and second, electing an assembly or parliament. Free speech, freedom of the press and freedom to form political parties were seen as basic liberties and as human rights.

The great democratic innovation "universal manhood suffrage" was not, however, continued after its first practice in 1792 because the bourgeoisie did not want to grant voting power to the unpropertied lower classes. Nevertheless the idea went on attracting the enfranchised lower classes throughout the 19th century.

Equality — civic equality — the Revolution put an end to privileges and brought the

aristocracies down to the social level of the commoners. This was an equality of rights and of opportunity in all aspects of life. Citizens were equal before the law, had equal rights of access to promotion in the civil service and equal right to travel and to secure an education.

Fraternity — nationalism — in the past, patriotism existed on a local basis. People were loyal to their immediate feudal lords. During the Revolution the removal of class privileges in France, the abolition of feudal provinces and the existence of threats at home and abroad all contributed to the growth of “nationalism” and “brotherhood” of Frenchmen. Nationalists in other countries were as well affected first by the revolutionary ideas and later by Napoleon’s deeds.

Few have condemned the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, but agreement ends there. Disputes rage between republicans and monarchists, liberals and conservatives, revolutionaries and reformers as to what kind of government should have resulted. Three main ideas have emerged that democratic parliamentary government is the best; that yet another revolution is necessary to gain the social justice that the bourgeoisie denied to the lower classes; and that good government could be expected only from a leader-genius. All these ideas have its own advocates, in theory and in practice.

Discuss the contributions of Napoleon Bonaparte to the rise of nationalism in Europe.

In his “Memoirs” written on St. Helena, Napoleon posed himself as the champion of the French Revolution and of nationalism. Certainly he had great influence on the development of European nationalism.

Napoleon and France

In France, we need to understand the relationship between Napoleon and the French Revolution. In pre-Revolution years, France was a decentralized state with strong regional tendencies. It meant that the people of France owed their loyalties to their feudal lords, and not to their country.

The Revolution and its turmoil turned France into a nation state. The French people were proud of their achievements and they were determined to protect what they had achieved. Moreover, the policy mobilized the whole nation for war. As such, nationalism began to emerge in France.

In the Napoleonic era, this tendency was strengthened. When Napoleon ruled France, he gave the country a modern and centralized government. When Napoleon went to war, he mobilized the whole nation to fight against the enemies of France. When Napoleon brought military victories, the whole nation was filled with pride and patriotism. Finally when Napoleon fell from power, the Napoleonic Legend lingered, reminding the French people of past glories and greatness. In short, Napoleon aroused nationalism and chauvinism in France and gave that country the basis of a nation-state.

Napoleon and the Powers

The slogan “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” was made use of by Napoleon when he went to war with the monarchs of the great Powers. Certainly he helped to end many abuses of the Ancient Regime in countries under French control. He also built up efficient governments, introduced reforms and abolished feudalism.

Yet Napoleon invoked the spirit of nationalism against himself, particularly in Spain and Germany, because of his unwise policies. The first was his desire to make his enemies pay for the wars. After defeating the powers, he imposed on them humiliating treaties which forced them to supply him with money and men and to cede him territories. Such harshness led people in the conquered states, particularly Prussia, to try to strengthen their governments and to throw off French rule.

A second unwise policy was Napoleon’s dynastic designs. He forced other countries to accept his brothers or French generals as rulers. Thus, his brother Joseph had been made the king of Naples, and later the king of Spain; his brother Louis the king of Holland; his brother Jerome the king of Westphalia; and Marshal Murat the king of Naples. These measures aroused the peoples to free themselves from French domination. Consequently, wars were waged against Napoleon, and the Peninsula War (1808-13) was a good example.

A third unwise policy was Napoleon's desire to make Europe a single, united entity under French influence. He therefore forced other countries to remodel their institutions on French lines and to accept the Continental System. Such actions caused the conquered nations to respond by identifying their independence with the preservation of their customs, histories and sovereignty. To get rid of foreign domination was the rallying cry of many European countries. In October 1813 the Battle of the Nations was fought at Leipzig. Napoleon was defeated by an allied army of half a million men. The other countries had at last defeated Napoleonic France and reasserted their national sovereignty.

Napoleon and new states

In pre-Napoleon times, both Italy and Germany were decentralized and ruled by alien powers. Napoleon at first secured the support of the German and Italian peoples by promising them the overthrow of tyranny. His invading armies were treated as liberators.

Napoleon then proceeded to institute reforms and territorial re-arrangement in these countries. He reduced the number of sovereign states in Germany and created a Confederation of the Rhine; he also aided unification in Italy by the creation of the North Italian Kingdom.

Yet Napoleon's looting policy (by 1812 Italy was sending 2/3 of her revenue to France) and dynastic designs angered the Italians and Germans. They decided to overthrow another alien and despotic rule — that of France.

The Congress of Vienna in 1815, however, frustrated the Italians and Germans. Italy was again divided and dominated by Austria. The re-structured German Confederation was practically powerless, preserving only a vague image of unity. Yet the memories and facts of unification during the Napoleonic era lingered on. In the 19th century, both the German and Italian nationalists continued their struggle for unification and independence.

Napoleon also encouraged Polish nationalism by giving the Poles the illusion of independence in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. When the Congress of Vienna again partitioned Poland, the Poles were disappointed and they persisted in a struggle for independence.

We have seen how great a change Napoleon had brought to European nationalism. He quickened the forces of change released by the French Revolution. His conquering armies caused an upsurge of nationalism wherever they went. The attempt at restoration in the Vienna Congress could no longer hold these forces at bay for long.